

# Killed His Girl Wife and Her Mother to Save Their Souls

*The Amazing "Murder Vocation" That Led Evangelist Padrick to Lure His Gaily Attired and Powdered Victims to a Lonely Moonlit Bridge and Pray for Their Salvation as He Watched Them Die*



Evangelist Elliott Padrick, Self-Confessed Murderer.

"For he that is dead is freed from sin."  
—Romans 6:7.  
"It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the souls."—Leviticus 17:11.

**W**ILLIE MAE PADRICK, sixteen, pretty and a preacher's bride, liked silk stockings, paint and powder, dances, chicken suppers and what other amusements the small town of Dover, Georgia, offered.

Elliott Padrick, her youthful evangelist husband, said she played with "the devil's toys." He prayed for her, preached at her, exhorted her to repent. She and her mother were doomed, he said.

When Willie Mae only giggled, Padrick groaned and read his Bible. Two verses—one from the Old Testament and one from the New—caught his brooding eyes like letters of fire.

One night, where the Dover road crosses the muddy waters of the Ogeechee down in the wiregrass belt of Georgia, Elliott Padrick killed his girl wife and his mother-in-law.

"I slew them to save their souls!" he cried to his horrified accusers. "They are freed from sin! Their blood is their atonement!"

Padrick's confession, shouted through the bars of his cell, revealed an astounding drama of religious frenzy, mad love, a simple young girl's yearning for fine feathers, a mother's bitter disappointment in ambitions for her daughter—played out against a small-town background of suspicion and gossip—reaching its tragic climax in the double murder on the moonlit bridge at midnight.

Young Padrick was brought up in a religious atmosphere. His father is a minister. Two of his brothers became ministers. He could quote whole pages of the Gospel while he was still in knickerbockers—at fifteen he was leading prayer at camp meetings.

He had studied hard at theological school, received his exhorter's license, and was looking forward to ordination on his twenty-first birthday, when he met Willie Mae Dixon and her mother, Mrs. Byron Dixon.

Willie Mae was a local belle. She liked "a good time." When she smiled the youth of Dover had heart palpitations. When she passed they craned their sunbaked necks. But Elliott Padrick, the boy preacher, got more smiles than all the rest.

Willie Mae's mother adored her daughter. She wanted her to dress "stylish." She had visions of a rich husband for Willie Mae. But the Dixons were something less than well-to-do and millionaires do not grow like daisies down in the wiregrass. Willie Mae's mother also smiled on the boy preacher. He was popular. People compared him to Billy Sunday. They said he was going to get the pastorate at Green's Cut.

So Willie Mae and Elliott Padrick got married, and the two of them, with Mother Dixon, went to Green's Cut, where the methodists were holding a revival and Elliott would assist the local pastor, and, incidentally, show the Green Cutters what a preacher he was.

Not only from Padrick himself, but from Mrs. R. T. Rowell, with whom they stayed at Green's Cut, and from others in the community, comes the story of what happened to blast the boy preacher's chances for the pastorate, to turn his mother-in-law against him, and to start the morbid brooding that eventually was to make him a killer.

Though she was a preacher's wife, say



Mrs. Byron Dixon, Padrick's Mother-in-Law, and Her Little Son.

the gossips of Green's Cut, pretty Mrs. Padrick still liked "a good time." She smiled, she bobbed her hair, she wore earrings and she rouged. Her mother defended her against Padrick's protests. They would scoff at him, says Mrs. Rowell, when Padrick would return from the revival meeting where he had denounced modern fashions. They would laugh when he opened his Bible and read such passages as these:

"In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with platted hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array. . . . The aged women likewise, that they . . . teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed."

One day Padrick stamped into the parlor, white-faced and shaking. He had just received word from the presiding elder, he said, that he was not to have the pastorate of the Green's Cut church. It was plain, accused Padrick, that his butterfly wife was the cause.

The announcement was a double shock. Mrs. Dixon saw her dreams of a comfortable personage home go toppling. She turned on Padrick, according to his own story, and denounced him as a sniveling no-account, who did nothing but sigh and sing psalms.

Padrick's hatred of his mother-in-law—a hatred he frankly admits—dated from that moment. And her hatred of him, he charges, led her to turn his wife against him, to encourage pretty Mrs. Padrick to flirt with other men, to dress her smartest and "do what she pleased."

"They went to live on a farm, where Padrick, disappointed in his pulpit prospects, took to dairying and raising chickens. Occasionally he would preach, and generally these sermons would be aimed at 'women who maketh a man ashamed and are a rottenness in his bones.'"

He says he would come home and go down on his knees and pray for his wife's soul and the soul of his mother-in-law, and that they would taunt him while he prayed, and ridicule him. Then Padrick would

Pleasure Loving Willie Mae Padrick, the Evangelist's Wife, Girl Victim of Her Young Preacher-Husband's Homicidal Fury.

rise and take his Bible and go into another room and brood long in silence.

After one of these scenes Mrs. Dixon told him to "get out." She flung his suitcase at his feet and ordered him never to show his face at their door again. Padrick picked up the bag. He went into the yard. He collected a few of his best chickens, and with these and his suitcase and his Bible under his arm he trudged down the dusty road.

He was away four months. Part of this time he preached in the churches of his father and his brothers. Much of the rest of the time he spent in prayer. He had made up his mind to seek a reconciliation with his wife, when he got two letters from Dover. The first was from her—a love note. The second told him, he says, that his wife was "running around" with a man from Statesboro.

Red anger seized Padrick. When he cooled it was only to recoil before a ghastly idea that had flashed into his mind. He says he spent night after night on his knees. The Fifth Commandment was explicit, but into Padrick's feverish brain were burned other verses—the atonement of sin by death!

He was still engaged in a fearful struggle when he sat down and wrote his wife this letter:

"Dearest One: Your sweet letter at hand. Wish I, too, could have been with you in Oliver. Say, little girlie, have a pleasant surprise for you. Meet me sure at Clito Monday night in the sedan. Would love to meet you there alone, as you know we haven't been together much. Won't you

come and prove your love? Trust me and love me. Yours,

"ELLIOTT."

As his train sped across the country that night Padrick's thoughts were in a turmoil. One second he shook with love of his wife. The next he was confronted with that dreadful vision of a lifeless body, but a soul saved. In his hip-pocket was a pistol, but when he alighted from the train at Clito, he says, he was still in a muddle of indecision. And then, as he dropped from the platform, something seemed to crack inside his skull.

There was his wife, waving at him from the front seat of a small sedan. There was his mother-in-law, grimly upright in the back. But, in his own words, they were "dressed like lost women"—his wife in short skirts and a pair of open-work stockings, her cheeks painted, her lips a line of scarlet, her eyes rimmed with black. Padrick got into the automobile and took the wheel. He turned the car into the road to Dover. It was a long drive—a dark and lonely drive. Halfway home the road led across the Ogeechee River, where the water gurgled under a bridge and lost itself in a cat-tail marsh.

Padrick (by his own confession) planned to stop the car in the middle of the bridge, kill both women, toss their bodies into the marsh, and, standing on the beam above, cry to the moonlit heaven that these sinners had expiated their sins in death!

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Save for one detail, he carried out this crime ruthlessly. A farmer, crossing the bridge shortly after midnight, walked into the blood-spattered car. Mrs. Dixon was dead. Her daughter, shot through and through, lived only long enough to rasp out the name of the murderer—her husband. A galloping posse discovered him, an

hour later, stumbling along the road to Dover. He fell on his knees, imploring sheriff, deputies and God for mercy. And this was what he cried: "I killed them to save their souls, and then—they—I couldn't touch their bodies! I was going to throw them off the bridge, into the river, but I couldn't touch them, I couldn't!"

